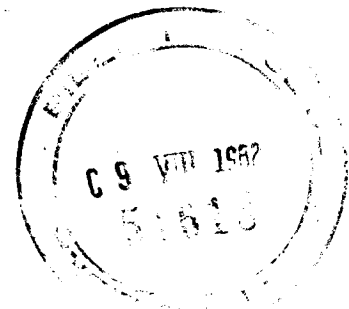


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DILEMMAS OF RESEARCH AID TO EDUCATION
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Paper prepared for the "Bellagio" Education
Group of Donor Agencies organized by the
German Foundation for International Development,
West Berlin, February 9-14, 1981.

ARCHIV
KING
no. 3

DILEMMAS OF RESEARCH AID TO EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The presence of some limited funding for educational research overseas has produced inevitably a small specialised interest in the problems and processes of aid administration. The purpose of this present short paper is to analyse something of what has been learnt internationally about this funding. The main emphasis will be less upon funding of post-graduate degrees in education which take many Third World students to the industrialized countries than on the direct funding of local researchers by a variety of international organisations.

Funded versus unfunded research: local versus foreign

It may be worth noting at the outset that the very notion of funding research suggests the need to guard against some rather obvious preconceptions. One is that research can be divided into good research - which is funded - and bad research which is not. Clearly an enormous amount of educational research activity is carried on without special funding, by people who regard it as a natural consequence of working in higher education. A danger of the very existence of even limited funding for research is that it stratifies the producers of educational knowledge into 'successful grantees' and scholars who have no financial backing for their work. Even though many in the latter category may not have applied for funding, there will often be a tendency for the institution or for other faculty to consider the unfunded scholar as somehow less research-oriented than his funded counterpart.

In poorer countries, it should be even more obvious that if research is to go on at all, much of it cannot attract particular financial support. Yet the distinction in status between funded and unfunded researchers is even more marked in the Third World. For one thing, often the very poverty of the general academic environment implies that being funded means much more than research funds to carry out a particular enquiry. It probably guarantees access, for a shorter or longer time, to a whole set of basic research materials that are frequently unobtainable to local university staff. This is not a question of access to sophisticated computing, but to such things as paper, stencilling ink, some Xeroxing. If the grant, however small, from overseas is in one of the currencies that are acceptable for ordering journal subscriptions, recent publications, this is invaluable in many countries of the Third World when banks make it difficult or impossible to get the foreign exchange necessary - subscription, and even university libraries find it hard to maintain complete journal runs, as bank policy and currencies continue to

fluctuate. *1(It would be interesting to know, by region, how many individual subscriptions to, say, C.E.R. or C.E. come from local researchers in the Third World). Even a small research grant in a hard currency, therefore, is a license to be up to date.

But it's more than that. It typically provides access through money for postage *2(In Zaire, in 1979, it cost a primary school teacher's monthly salary to send a heavy airmail letter outside), for travel, and dissemination to some part of the international or regional research community. Possibly because the grant was part of some wider agency network of research on a common theme, it includes travel to meet researchers from other countries. Such regional, or international, travel - though limited - is conducted through hard currency, and there is again the opportunity of picking up professional and other materials not available locally.

In short, research grants in the Third World, leaving aside what they may do in the furtherance of the subject in hand, are inseparable from certain perquisites and privileges that are much harder to come by in developing countries than they would be to academics elsewhere, whether funded or not. In this situation, it could be important to ascertain to what extent serious research actually does continue amongst those who do not receive outside funds, and what kind of research it is. One of the more obvious conclusions of any such study might be that funding dictates research style. Unfunded research is much more likely to employ methods of enquiry that are cheap - desk research, library research, historical analysis, participatory research, or contribution to the theory of a particular area. These are frequently very labour intensive but, more important, they cannot often be easily delegated to research assistants. Expensive research, by contrast, in the social sciences is almost by definition involved with survey techniques, large samples (or smaller samples frequently interviewed or observed), and sophisticated data processing techniques. The data gathering can very often be delegated and hence the costs of assistants, per diems, travel, workshops, etc., etc. The problem with these almost inevitable costs of survey research is that they can too easily suggest a status difference between, say, theoretical or historical work which is assumed not to need funding, and quantitative research which attracts it. More than this, the closer the apparent link between external funding and methods requiring extensive data collection and processing, the more it will be assumed that donor agencies prefer that kind of research, and the more researchers may be turned to this mode to acquire funds. One of the more unfortunate

*1)
*2) Footnotes

outcomes of this overdrawn dichotomy between theoretical or historical analysis and survey research techniques is that, in many parts of the world, mounds of data have been accumulated, and have outweighed the capacity of the researcher or the fragile data analysis system to make sense of it or even to process it. Another is the impression given that external agencies prefer to fund various kinds of quantitative research, and believe that this has somehow a closer bearing upon development than other forms.

We shall return to the question of research-related-to-development later, but finally on the issue of funded versus unfunded research, it is worth distinguishing local from foreign funding. Surprisingly, little seems to be written about local research funding. It is too easily accepted that what funds are available through universities or national research councils are too small to allow serious research to be done, or that in strained circumstances, university administrations divert research votes to pay for more urgent items. Where they exist, the range for individual grants seems often to be equivalent to \$3,000-5,000 U.S. maximum.

Foreign funds for research are often said to be necessary because of this irregularity and occasionally complete absence of local research money. In reality, external funds seem to pay little attention to local norms and funding structures. Though said to complement local sources, foreign funds are much more likely to make a stark contrast with local equivalents, by being perhaps ten or twenty times larger than the local university could usually offer. In addition, for various reasons, including administrative convenience, one foreign grant of \$70,000 U.S. to a single researcher is more common than seven small grants to initiate or maintain a series of different endeavours in a university faculty or department.

From this follows, almost inevitably, the visibility of the foreign-assisted researcher, and the extra attention paid to his research and to his research results even before these are available. Dissemination of externally funded research starts off with a clear advantage over local endeavours. Even without a dissemination strategy, foreign research money gets official attention. It has, first of all, to be cleared by the appropriate ministry or ministries who may well have formally to request such overseas aid; it is all necessary for the local vice-chancellor to be acquainted with the project and personally to ask for its support. Later, the required substantive and financial reports will pass regular intervals through the university or institute administration. There is nothing particularly inappropriate in any of this, but the unintended consequences of local and donor bureaucratic procedures is that there is a great deal more visibility for the recipient of foreign

funds, and the person gains a status which has no exact counterpart in the universities of the industrialized world. The lack of any continuum between local grants of \$5,000 U.S. or \$100,000 U.S. from abroad means that there is a real danger of external funds skewing or dividing the local research community.

In countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America, the issue of foreign funding is more dramatic. Social science research institutes, including those concerned with education, have reconstituted themselves outside universities, and are entirely dependent on foreign funds for salary and rentals as well as for research. Clearly, the role and impact of foreign research aid needs more attention in these Chilean and Argentinian centres and in countries such as India where only a fraction of the research done is aided from outside.

To a limited extent the distinction between locally and externally funded research is reminiscent of the debate about the impact of overseas versus local training. (1) There is the same acknowledgement by the donor community that locally funded research like local university training is somehow the ideal, and a similar agonising about forming a very 'visible college' of foreign funded researchers or postgraduates. It would be interesting, however, to document how close the connections really are between overseas training and subsequent overseas funding of research in the Third World. Is, for example, an overseas doctorate the first stage towards an overseas research grant? If this is the case for much of foreign funded research, then a number of questions are raised about the small group who manage to get their graduate training overseas. How important is the style of research performed at the graduate level to the kind of research carried out with foreign funds after graduation? Is the foreign graduate degree itself used as a filter or guarantee by donors concerned with aiding high quality research in developing countries? The proportions of foreign versus local post-graduate training differ so markedly in developing countries that it would be difficult to establish any pattern. In some Latin American and African countries, all higher degrees in education have to be obtained overseas.

There is, consequently, a much closer awareness with these of the research issues current in the industrialized countries than there is in countries which have long produced their own doctoral students. Whatever the actual pattern, it would certainly be expected that, when a foundation or agency has over a decade or more built up an institute or university department through a careful programme of overseas training, it would continue to make funds available for research to its scholars returning from abroad. If there is any current pattern linking overseas training and later participation in overseas funded research, it is possible that this may alter in the next decade. Foundations in the West

are no longer able financially to bring large numbers of foreign students for training that they were able to in the 1960s and 1970s. Limited funds are still available for some of the brightest candidates from the poorer countries, but increasingly the richest sector of the Third World will take up the graduate training available in the North. A combination of reduced enrolment in the North itself and a desire for the fee income from these usually oil-rich countries will make it difficult to avoid some such polarisation. It is not clear, however, that after such overseas training donor research funds will necessarily then go to these richer countries, but will tend rather to go to countries in greater need.

Although donor organisations broadly aware of the divisiveness inherent in the funding of research, and of the consequences of basing research upon the standards and styles of the West's premier institutions, it would have been difficult in practice to suggest that training or subsequent research be carried out at lower standards. Once the decision to build up the newer Third World universities had been taken in the 1950s and 1960s, it was difficult to alter course. Switches there have been in support of some disciplines rather than others but the banner of 'international standards' has seldom been lowered in the support of training or of subsequent research support. The issue of foreign-aided research is, therefore, intimately connected with the style of university development, and the pattern established for recruiting and training its cadres.

This pattern has been built up over ten to twenty years in many cases, and much longer with several universities in India, North Africa, and Latin America. Nowadays, however, the research-orientation of a university is frequently a criterion by which it is judged internationally. Inevitably, this criterion will favour universities which have been developed more recently with a strong tradition of North American or European research. University systems founded on earlier European notions of university may still reflect those traditions, and consequently offer few graduate or research opportunities. Despite these historical distinctions, it is tempting to rank universities by the seriousness with which they approach research, and to talk generally of healthy and unhealthy research climates, mature and immature research environment.

Research Traditions and Research Environments

In recent years, there has been a little closer examination of research traditions operating in different parts of the Third World, and some work has been done using categories like 'the Latin American Research Tradition', the 'Francophone African Research Tradition', 'The Anglophone Caribbean Tradition', and so on. This has been valuable

in suggesting a different set of historical starting points in different countries, and in getting away from the belief that the Third World has a common set of research problems. Even when the focus narrows to a single disciplinary area, education, and to a single country or region, there remains a remarkable degree of heterogeneity. As little as a dozen years ago, educational research had a rather similar face in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, all under the umbrella of the University of East Africa. National politics and local priorities have cut the three countries researchers apart from each other, and by now there is the making of quite important differences in the organisation and support of educational research. (2) Much more remarkable differences exist if some of the private educational research centres of Latin America are juxtaposed with the Educational Research and Development Units of the University of West Indies and University of Guyana. (3) The former subsist on research. In some cases, they may have been chased out of Universities in countries actively discouraging social science research, including education; in others, groups of researchers elected to go the private, non profit-making, research route, often because the predominantly undergraduate universities did not offer scope for full-time research. The result in both Latin American cases is an intensification of effort, and an organisation of work around particular projects each with their own funding, and deadlines. If generous long-term funding cannot be guaranteed (which is true of most centres), there is a pattern of multiple donor support for a variety of small projects.

New ideas are constantly generated, transformed into project documents, and taken to appropriate sources for funding. In many cases, the funding is short-term, so that a project is often scarcely started before the researcher has to think of the next. Any gap between projects is a gap in salary. The result of this style of research is a heightened impression of productivity and, in many cases for the sake of continuity, a tailoring of research done to fit the kind of money or funding available. It is possible to exaggerate the insecurity and dependency of private research centres. They do manage somehow even in the most oppressive political situations to carry on with a wide range of different research themes. There is very little government interest in their findings, perhaps because the centres are now outside the regular university system and hence have little formal responsibility for training the next generation of students into researchers.

By contrast, the Commonwealth Caribbean territories are not pressurized by self-inflicted deadlines of multiple outside contracts. Indeed there seems remarkably little external influence on research at all. Much of what takes place in research sections of education fa-

culties in the Caribbean is curriculum development, with a great deal of the extra mural work associated with English institutes of education, intensified by the scatter of dependent, smaller islands. Researchers are frequently paid their regular salaries to be subject specialists in the curriculum, developing and testing materials, and carrying on in-service work. It is easy in this atmosphere for research projects separate from the daily round to take many years to complete.

It is difficult also in comparing the Caribbean situation with the full-time research institute of other countries not to construct a hierarchy of research styles and environments. Indeed, this is one of the dangers inherent in mapping the research environment of various countries, and spotting the many research styles and methodologies that seem to be missing. It is too readily assumed that there is a scale (stages of growth?) from an immature research environment with only one or two types of research in evidence to a mature one where all is on offer - from experimental research to participatory research to ethnographic research, etc. (4)

The move to reflect on the specificity of research environments in individual countries is welcome even though there is the risk that countries can be allocated by donors to first, second, or third 'division', depending on the fragility or robustness of their research situation. There is certainly the risk of over-rationalising the research process, but it is probably preferable that more rather than less is known about how education and research are actually organised in particular countries. Lacking detailed information, it is more tempting for outsiders to make judgements about the innovation and research needs of the Third World as a whole.

Aid and Research Priorities

The setting of education research priorities by outside bodies in an arbitrary manner might be somewhat less likely if an up-to-date account existed of research done in a particular environment. It is possible, though, that a series of sector reports on research by country could simply lead to a new form of 'prioritisation' from outside. It would then be possible for potential funders to argue against an individual proposal or institute on the grounds that the country does not yet possess the 'right mix' of research management skills, research support institutions, dissemination networks, etc., etc.

In reality, the likelihood of individual freedom to do research on the topic of one's choice being constrained by some analysis of the larger research environment in a country is rather faint. A really good analysis of the weaknesses of current research could lead sensitive donors to build more elements into their grant than they might otherwise have done.

The more general problem faced by Third World researchers is not too much information on the side of the donors, but too little. And the latter is a major factor in determining that priorities continue to be set about the kind of work they are ready to fund. But ignorance of a country's needs is only one of many reasons that education research priorities tend still to be set from outside. It may be useful to look briefly at some of the others.

First, in many cases, the educational research priority of an agency is derived from the priority it sets upon the broad role of education in development. Often, therefore, within an agency the funds for research are actually determined by broader judgements about what sector of education should receive aid. If, as happened a decade ago, there is disillusion by overseas donors with the university sector in developing countries and a new interest in basic and non-formal education, there will be a tendency to restrict research and evaluation funds also to these areas. Even more broadly, when the aid priorities of agencies shifted to what was loosely called more aid to the poorest, the research counterpart tended to swing also to research on poverty, primarily in rural areas, and later on to urban areas. Whatever may be objectionable about this narrowing of focus amongst many agencies at that time, it did - with the benefit of hindsight - provide in the education sector an unprecedented concentration of research on one of the hitherto researched areas - informal, out of school, and adult education. Another filter that is frequently placed on foreign research funding is the notion of 'comparative advantage', to use the jargon. Agencies are naturally concerned to some extent with their own image, and with making some impact. It is tempting then to select an aspect of education or of research that is particularly in need of attention, in the eyes of the agency, and concentrate funding upon it. Sometimes, indeed, an agency has no choice. The funding was restricted by the original charter and can only be used for, say, early childhood education, or vocational education, or action programmes. But in other cases, one or two particular areas are chosen by the agency, and research organised around them.

Clearly, a good deal of the research sponsored in the Third World follows priorities set by funding agencies in the more industrialized world. There are several problems with this. For one thing, the close relationship between academics and research councils in Europe and North America via advisory bodies has no counterpart in the relation between funding bodies and Third World universities. Consequently, there is much less open knowledge by Third World scholars of what foreign funds are available for what kind of research. Occasionally there are small research competitions for donor funds, and these are advertised publicly for the country or region where they are applicable. But a great deal of

the foreign research money seems to be allocated as the result of extended personal discussions between donor and recipient, followed by formal application. The dialogue about possible project funding is much more highly personalized in agency-Third World discussions than it is in the North. This may to some extent be necessary because of the difficulties of operating peer review, or of judging the feasibility of a project without a personal site visit.

The consequence of these perhaps reasonable and even inevitable procedures is that informal networks become extremely important. It is relatively simple for researchers already on such a network to detect changes in funding policy and agency priorities, but the whole subject seems virtually inaccessible to large numbers of researchers in developing countries.

A further tendency of the 'comparative advantage' approach is to draw researchers in different countries into a network of studies on a similar theme. Again, there is much to recommend this kind of mechanism; it breaks down the isolation of individual researchers, and compensates to some limited extent for the very poor communication of research knowledge among countries in the Third World. But, as the whole idea of a research network is quite beyond the resources of most countries likely to participate, it is a research experience that is possible locally, and one that is limited to a handful of scholars. The attractions of participation in a number of cases likely to outweigh the question of whether the research proposal is really a local priority.

One of the most problematic issues in discussion of research priorities is one that was touched on earlier - a preference in agencies to fund research-related-to-development or research-related-to-policy. This sounds an eminently sensible objective (5) and was widely promoted in the new universities of Africa but, on closer analysis, the term raises many questions. Often research preferred by overseas funders is termed 'policy relevant' or 'policy manipulable' to contrast it with research that is academic, theoretical or, presumably, irrelevant to policy-makers. The image suggested by the term is of the policy-maker hungry for research results to inform policy, and of the researcher feeding him these. The picture bears little relation to the reality of the interface between research and policy, and pays scant attention to the obstacles to dissemination into policy of all types of research.

Also lying behind the use of the term policy-relevant is the suggestion that the policy-maker is a practical implementer, eager like Mr. Gradgrind to consume facts, and expecting research to answer

down-to-earth questions about what 'works best' in what conditions. From this it is tempting to argue that research funding should concentrate on soluble, manipulable problems. 'Research' in a word 'makes a difference'.

Indeed a great deal of this kind of research has been funded externally - quantitative, problem-oriented, efficiency-related. What kind of teacher behaviour seems most related to improving school achievement? What can be said about the impact of class size, of textbooks, of self-instructional systems, etc., etc? The danger is not so much with the research method, but with the assumption that the research will, unlike more theoretical or historical work, produce answers that can be acted upon. Whatever the record on implementation of the results of such research, it is at least arguable that work of a more theoretical approach may be equally implemented (cf. the work of Freire which over a decade and a half has reached and affected many people with responsibility for literacy policy).

Another aspect of this unhelpful distinction between practical research and academic research is that a great deal of research is carried out in evaluation of various innovations, and assistance programmes in the Third World. Previously, this evaluative research would be done by consultants from the more industrialized countries, but increasingly it is contracted directly to scholars in the Third World. This may seem far removed from the question of local versus overseas research priorities. In reality, however, the bulk of the innovations, infrastructural experiments, or integrated rural development projects which require evaluations are those identified with foreign aid. Precisely because of this there is considerable financial advantage to participating in such an evaluation. Indeed, in countries where there is an abundance of agency projects, the attractions of contract evaluation research are overwhelming, and it is easy to envisage the short-term contract research mode undermining commitment to long-term disciplinary research. (6) The contrast between largely unfunded disciplinary research and highly profitable evaluation research for international agencies may not be widespread, but it is one that has reached serious proportions in a number of countries, and has a more potentially distorting effect if the local research community is still very small.

Conclusions

As agencies continue to think about the impact of research aid to education in developing countries, and as local scholars examine the opportunities to undertake research with overseas funds, it may be worth noting a number of preliminary directions that arise from this short paper.

1. Insufficient attention is given by international agencies to unfunded research carried on in countries of the North and the South as an ordinary part of being a university teacher or member of a research institute.
2. There is a tendency to assume that good research is monetised research, and there is a suggestion that funded research is often funded at a level far beyond local norms. The consequence of both these factors for the ordinary pursuit and production of new knowledge in Third World universities has not been examined.
3. The monetisation of research has led much more to the overseas support of quantitative survey research than to research less concerned with the collection and analysis of large data sets.
4. There are obvious dangers in the fact that relations between recipients and donor agencies are much more highly personalised than between research councils and academics in North America and Europe. The predominance of informal networks effectively acts as a selection device, but the process may throw up a small international research elite who act as 'translators' or 'brokers' between outside funds and local institutions.
5. Little is known of the relationship between foreign research training and later foreign research funding. In many cases doubtless a foreign research degree is the first step towards overseas funding of research by the same person in the field.
6. The recent interest in mapping the educational research environment in a number of developing countries is a welcome advance on the assumption that Third World countries share very similar research conditions. Any very mechanistic analysis of the essential elements in a research infrastructure could lead, however, to an unhelpful division between more and less 'mature' research environments, with certain categories of research allegedly appropriate to each.
7. Education research priorities for the use of donor funds continue for many reasons to be set largely outside the countries where the research will take place. This happens for a variety of reasons, including financial necessity for some researchers to adapt their work to whatever funding is available, desire of agencies to be innovative, and fund work in areas where they

have a 'comparative advantage' over other donors, use of networking, and many others. It is widely felt by local researchers that agencies have a set of priorities that cut across all countries, even when agency rhetoric stresses responsiveness. In the interests of equity, and of reaching beyond the informal networks which exist at the moment, more attention should be given to the publicising of research competitions in the Third World.

8. One consequence of the application of outside research funds to educational problems is the conversion of research from an ordinary activity to one that is carried on for a specific number of months or years. The tendency in external research funds is for a one or two-year duration, and in the case of evaluation activity it is often a contract for a much shorter period. For the successful pursuit of disciplinary research in education, it would be worth exploring much longer periods of support at much lower levels of funding.
9. Attention needs to be paid to the local sources for the funding of research, and careful consideration given to ways in which overseas funds can strengthen and regularise these local processes, rather than appealing as an extraordinary activity for the fortunate few.

FOOTNOTES

1. Some interesting papers are available on this theme from the Eastern African Universities Research Project, organised by Dr. T.L. Maliyamkeno, at the University of Dar-es-Salaam.
2. See David Court 'The Idea of Social Science in East Africa: an aspect of the development of Higher Education', Minerva XVII, 2, 1979.
3. Errol Miller, 'An Examination of Alternative Approaches to strengthening National Educational Research Capacity in the English speaking Caribbean', 1979, Research Review and Advisory Group, IDRC, Ottawa.



4. Two contributions which usefully map the educational research environment are: S. Shaeffer, Increasing National Capacity for Educational Research: Issues, Dynamics, and Alternatives, Research Review and Advisory Group (RRAG), Manuscript series, IDRC, Ottawa, November 1980, and J.P. Vielle 'The Impact of Research on Educational Change', RRAG paper, IDRC, Ottawa, 1979.
5. For the wide range of ways in which, particularly, East African universities were drawn into development research, see D. Court, 'Contract Research in Conference on Strengthening Social Science Capacity in the Developing Areas', Bellagio (Rockefeller) October, 1980.
6. Ibid.